

### Mass Media Week in Belarus

Info-posting April 15 – 28, 2013

**The reporting period was noted for the scandalous decision on Belarus Press Photos 2011 album; another refusal to re-register the magazine ARCHE; detentions of journalists in Minsk and Ashmiany on the day of Chernobyl catastrophe; arrests of radio journalists; hacker attacks on several independent and human rights websites.**

**On April 17** the Ministry of Information again **denied re-registration** to the **magazine ARCHE. The Beginning**. The letter signed by the Deputy Minister Uladzimir Matusevich said that the editorial office had failed to indicate in its application the information about reassignment of Valery Bulhakau to the position of the editor-in-chief.

The editorial office called the decision repressive, aimed to close down the outlet, and announced that they would apply for re-registration one more time.

The last issue of the magazine was published on June 28, 2012. If ARCHE fails to publish the next issue by June 28 2013, the Ministry of Information will be able to liquidate the outlet according to the law.

*We remind that problems started for ARCHE on **September 14, 2012** when police and tax inspectors detained the chief editor of the magazine Valery Bulhakau at the presentation of the book “Sovetization of Western Belarus” by Y.Shumski. Valery Bulhakau was accused of unlawful entrepreneur’s activities.*

**On September 21** the Department of Financial Investigations (DFI) employees started a check-up in the publishing house which published Arche. In September 24 – 28 all documents for the last two years were seized for the check-up.

**On October 2** more than 5 000 books from the personal collection of Valery Bulhakau were confiscated.

**On October 4** the founder of the magazine Andrei Dynko was summoned for questioning to the DFI. After that Andrei Bulhakau substituted Valery Bulhakau as the chief editor, in order to save the outlet. Nevertheless, the DFI blocked the account of the magazine on the same day, and employees of the editorial team started to be called for questionings.

To continue publishing, the editorial office tried to re-register the magazine with a new founder. The **first** time the Ministry of Information refused in December 2012 on the grounds that the would-be editor-in-chief did not have proper qualifications (5-year work experience in an appropriate administrative position). **Next refusals** were explained by violations of the procedure of submitting the application. On March 11 the magazine ARCHE. Beginning received a **third** refusal of re-registration from the Ministry of Information. The official letter signed by Liliya Ananich said that the application of re-registration was filed with violation of article 12 of the Law on Mass Media – the founder did not provide his telephone number.

**On March 21, 2013** it was announced that the Investigative Committee of Minsk city and region denied starting criminal prosecution against Valery Bulhakau and ordered to unblock the bank account of the outlet (informed by a letter dated April 9).

**On April 18** Ashmiany district court (judge Aliaksandr Davydau) found that **Belarus Press Photo 2011 albums were extremist** materials. Nothing was told about further fate of the “condemned” 41 photo albums. Photo reporters **Yuliya Darashkevich, Vadzim Zamirouski and Aliaksandr Vasiukovich** were summoned as interested parties. The court ruled that they had to pay legal expenses 217.5 thousand rubles each (around 20 euros). The photographers disagreed and intended to appeal the court ruling.

The court hearing of Belarus Press Photo 2011 case, initiated by the KGB department in Hrodna region, took only one day.

The trial took place behind closed doors. Only the “parties concerned” with two attorneys, the representatives of KGB Department for Hrodna region, as well as the media lawyers **Andrei Bastunets** and **Harry Pahaniayla** were permitted to be present in the court room during the morning session. After a break mass media were allowed into court room, but all shootings were banned.

The judge dismissed the petitions for Andrei Bastunets and Harry Pahaniayla to take part as public representatives in the hearing; the motion for additional examination of the albums was dismissed, too.

*We remind that 41 albums of Belarus Press Photo 2011 were confiscated from the photographers on November 12, 2012 on the Lithuanian-Belarusian border.*

**April 19** in two **journalists were detained** not far from the Independence square, Minsk, when covering the **action of protest** staged by the civil initiative “Against unlawfulness in courts and prosecutor’s office”. The journalist of *Radio Svaboda* **Aleh Hruzdilovich** and cameraman of news agency *BelaPAN* **Siarhei Satsiuk** were detained around 10 am. They were taken to Maskouski district police department. The journalists were told they had been detained because they had been filming a regime object – the building of the Chamber of Representatives. The journalists demonstrated their press-cards and provided explanations. Aleh Hruzdilovich was photographed, recorded for video, and left his fingerprints; he was set free at around 2 pm; Siarhei Satsiuk was released at 1.30 pm. There were no any other procedural actions against them. All video recordings were deleted.

**On April 23** there was a hacker attack on the website **Charter’97** due to which the resource temporarily stopped working.

**On April 24** the chairperson of Vitebsk branch of the **Belarusian National Front** party **Leamid Autukhou** was summoned to a police department where he was presented an administrative protocol against him. He was accused of **violating the Law on Mass Media**: on **March 22** the party members **distributed** the party **bulletin *Magistrate*** the circulation of which allegedly exceeded 299 copies (which means it had to be registered as a mass medium).

In his turn Authukhou remarked that nobody counted the copies of the bulletin in his presence, and he did not know how the figure 299 appeared in the procedural document.

Then, on March 22, Leamid Authukhou and **Kastus Smolikau** were detained and blamed for violating the **Law on Mass Events** – the bulletins contained invitations for March 25 festive demonstration. Then the judge of Kastychnitski district court Ina Hrabouskaya sentenced them to 5 days’ administrative arrests. According to the ruling, all bulletins were to be destroyed. However, they have become grounds for the new prosecution.

**On April 24 at 11.50** am the website of the **European Radio for Belarus** stopped functioning – there was only an announcement about technical works on the main page.

The chief editor of the radio Vital Zybliuk said they registered an unusual number of connections, which led to assume they were subject to a **planned DDOS attack**. After midday the website started work again.

**On April 25** the journalist of the *Belarusian Radio Racyja* **Uladzimir Khilmanovich** was summoned via phone to the KGB department in Hrodna region. The KGB employee called himself Dolgikh and said the summons was within the competence of the KGB activities. The summons was appointed for April 26. The journalist assumed it was connected with his professional activities.

**On April 25** Mahilou regional court (judge **Pavel Klimau**) **upheld the sentence** to an independent distributor and author of the low-circulation newspaper *Mahilouski Vybar*. 66-year old **Valery Vusik** appealed against the ruling of Bialynichy district court in which he was found guilty of **libel and unlawful distribution of the newspaper**, and was fined 5 million rubles (500 euros).

In the cassation Mr. Vusik said that he had not been well familiarized with the case materials, and the judge Uladzimir Huz denied him the right to be represented by an attorney, and also dismissed the motion to hear his witnesses. He was also called to court by a phone call, less than a day before the court hearing.

*We remind that Valery Vusik was prosecuted under administrative laws after his critical publication about the situation at the local state-owned farming complex Lebiadzianka. Mr. Vusik affirmed that the complex suffered from mismanagement, doctored records and theft. Bialynichy district court found that the article contained false information which defamed the then chairperson of the complex Piotr Bialou. Now Mr. Vusik is going to appeal to the Supreme Court.*

On the early morning **April 25** the **Belarusian Partisan website was hacked**. The homepage demonstrated an **address from anonymous hackers** who claimed to be adherents of the Anonymous group. Anonymous is a subculture and movement advocating the idea of anonymity and freedom online. It opposes censorship and surveillance on the net. Expressing protests, the group has cracked different websites of governments and security organizations. The symbol of the group is Guy Fawkes' mask. The anonymous letter on *Belpartisan* accused the website of "pouring tons of dirt on the truthful Belarusian people" and of attempts to "destroy institutions of power like in Iraq or Libya" and contains warnings: "We could have [ruined] you, and Charter, and Viasna, and many others long time ago, but we give you a possibility to exist under our control. Why didn't we do it? We are just interested WHO, FROM WHERE and WHAT is saying. Now we have a list of talkers, and we warn you one last time: talk, write, but don't overdo, there is no need to pour dirt and insult PERSONALITY. The most zealous traitors of the Belarusian nation, we will publish them on the website Wiki Leaks, press and undress literally and metaphorically. And we will also publish all logins, IPs and mails of the cheekiest commentators who went beyond the borders of decency."

**On April 25** at around 10 pm the website of the human rights center **Viasna spring96.org was cracked**: the information in some articles was changed for the opposite. In particular, hackers changed the information that the famous screenwriter Andrei Kureichyk had signed the petition against the capital punishment: instead they wrote he supported the capital punishment. Also it was written that the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) supported the state policy of Belarus. Notably, information was changed in all three languages of the website - Belarusian, Russian and English. Admins from *Viasna* corrected the false information in half an hour. It should be noted that the websites *Charter'97*, *Belpartisan* and *Viasna* are banned for access from state establishments.

**On April 26** the press-service of the Ministry of Home Affairs **Kanstantin Shalkevich** informed that the **police would not search for hackers** who had attacked the websites *Belpartisan* and *Viasna* without a formal complaint: information about crimes published on websites is not a reason to start an investigation.

Those who suffered had to file a complaint. He also remarked that the cases would be investigated if the websites were in .by domain or of the complaints were filed by citizens of Belarus.

**On April 26** independent journalists **Aliaksandr Barazenska** and **Nasta Yaumen** were **detained in Astravets** were they came to report about a trip of opposition activists to the building site of a **nuclear station**. Policemen from local departments as well as from Minsk and KGB employees did not allow them to enter the building site; the journalists were detained at around 1pm. Their video cameras were checked, and all the video recorded in Astravets was deleted. After giving written explanations, the journalists were set free.

**On April 26** two journalists of *Nasha Niva* were **detained** after the **Chernobyl Way** sanctioned demonstration. **Aksana Rudovich** and **Iryna Arakhouskaya** tried to take the picture of a detention of an anarchist Ihar Trukhanovich. After that they were followed and detained in a trolleybus. The journalists were taken to a blue mini-van by people who did not care to introduce themselves. They were taken to the Soviet district police department; the police looked through the recordings, checked the women's IDs and set them free an hour later.

**On April 26** two more journalists were **detained** after the **Chernobyl Way** demonstration ended, at around 10 pm. **Henadz Barbarych** and **Aliaksandr Yarashevich** had their press cards on them. However, they were taken to the Soviet district police department; meantime, the duty police officer denied that any detainees had been brought there. At midnight the journalists' colleagues saw them being taken to the detention center in Akrestsina street. The journalists were accused of disobedience to police's demands (art. 23.4 of the Code of Administrative Violations), informed the duty officer in the detention center. However, the guard refused to take a parcel to the detainees this morning, saying all things can be transferred only after the trial, which is to take place only on Monday.

**On April 29** they were found guilty of disobeying lawful police's demands (art. 23.4 of the Administrative Code, judge Kiryl Palulekh) and **sentenced to three days' administrative arrest**.